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#### **CROSS-CUTTING**

**USAID** and **U.S.** Embassy/Kabul Celebrate Take Your Child to Work Day: On April 23, USAID and the U.S. Embassy/Kabul welcomed 166 Afghan children to celebrate Take Your Child to Work Day. The day's activities were both fun and educational, allowing the children to see where their family members work while learning about American culture and games.

In the morning, the Embassy's young visitors enjoyed a tour and fun activities put together by USAID's technical offices. The Office of Infrastructure, Engineering, and Energy offered building activities with balloons, while the Office of Democracy and Governance held a mock election. The children received voting materials – it's never too early for voter education – and cast their votes for their favorite television character. Following welcoming remarks from Deputy Ambassador Francis Ricciardone, the children devoted most of the afternoon to playing outdoor games such as soccer and duck, duck, goose.

Take Our Daughters to Work Day began in the United States in 1993. The program encouraged employees to invite their daughters to spend the day in the office, with the aim of exposing girls to various career opportunities. In 2003, the program expanded to include boys and is widely celebrated throughout the U.S.



Deputy Ambassador Ricciardone and his wife Marie celebrate Take Your Child to Work Day with young Afghans.

PHOTO: USAID/Afghanistan



A girl votes during USAID's mock election. PHOTO: USAID/Amy Koler

### ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT AND AGRICULTURE

**First National Park Established in Afghanistan:** In celebration of International Earth Day on April 22, the Director General of Afghanistan's National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) declared Band-e-Amir as Afghanistan's first national park. This designation affords legal protection to the lakes and surrounding landscape, and will ensure sustainable environmental management.

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A spectacular series of six deep blue lakes separated by natural travertine dams and set against red-rock cliffs and grasslands, Band-e-Amir National Park covers 59,000 hectares of land in Bamyan Province. Since 2006, USAID has been working with the Afghan Government and local communities surrounding Band-e-Amir to establish the national park. To ensure the park's long-term sustainability, USAID, through its partner the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), founded a local institution to manage the park and helped to prepare a management plan.

The national park designation will encourage economic development in the villages surrounding Band-e-Amir. With help from USAID and its partners,



On April 22, 2009, Band-e-Amir – a series of six lakes in Bamyan Province – was declared Afghanistan's first national park.

PHOTO: USAID/Julie Fossler

local entrepreneurs are already building small shops, restaurants, and hotels – in accordance with the park's environmental management plan – to serve the growing number of tourists. These improvements are expected to attract even more tourists over the coming years, contributing to Afghanistan's economic growth in an environmentally responsible manner.



A technician switches on the Dodarak Micro-Hydropower Plant for the first time. PHOTO: USAID/ADP/E

Micro-Hydropower Plant Brings Electricity and Economic Growth to Dodarak Village: On April 6, electricity flowed for the first time in Dodarak village in Nangarhar Province. Supplied by a new 60 KWH micro-hydropower plant funded by USAID, the electricity will improve the villagers' quality of life and open the door for new business opportunities. Currently, the plant provides 1,200 residents with electricity, allows local shops to sell cold food and drinks, and has the capacity to serve 600 additional households in neighboring villages.

The power plant, built in compliance with international standards, will provide electricity for up to 40 years. Electricity is available to the village's residents and businesses for a small, affordable fee, which will be

used to pay power plant technicians and perform needed maintenance.

Capitalizing on the new supply of electricity, USAID has worked with Dodarak residents over the past nine months to develop businesses in their village. The village will soon host a

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strawberry jam factory, a flour mill, a textile factory, and a carpentry facility, none of which could have operated without the electricity that the micro-hydropower plant provides. These businesses will provide needed employment and advance economic development in Dodarak and surrounding areas.

Excited at the new development prospects for his community, village head Malik Mir Alam Khan said, "This project is a blessing to the people of this village...in addition to the prospects that it will light up more houses, small industries will be established, employing a large number of people...the economy of the community has improved and I am sure more significant, positive changes will occur."

#### **ECONOMIC GROWTH**

New Communications Center in Takhar Province: Residents of the remote northern province of Takhar have gained a new outlet to communicate with the rest of Afghanistan and the world. A recently constructed telecommunications building – housing a telephone office, a post office, and internet facilities – is bringing affordable telephone and internet services to an underserved rural community. The center will also offer Western Union wire transfer services, and will improve access to elections information and government services by providing internet connectivity. Expected to serve 5,000 new subscribers, the communications center is part of a larger effort to make telecommunications services available throughout the country.



Dignitaries including Minister of Communications and Information Technology Sangin (cutting the ribbon) and the Governor of Takhar presided over the inauguration of the new center.

PHOTO: USAID/BearingPoint/MCIT



New women members of the IIFC. PHOTO: USAID/ARIES

Islamic Investment and Finance Cooperative Attracts
Women Members: Throughout Afghanistan, women are
frequently absent from the world of business and finance.
However, there are many motivated women entrepreneurs
who strive to gain access to the capital they need to grow
their businesses or who wish to open savings accounts to
manage family funds. In March, the Nangarhar Islamic
Investment and Finance Cooperative (IIFC) reached out to
potential women members in eastern Afghanistan, responding
to a request made by women community leaders.

The IIFC – a community-based, member-owned institution that provides sharia-compliant financial services – hired a

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membership development officer who conducted orientations with interested women in Nangarhar province. As a result of this outreach, 15 women joined the IIFC in a two-week period. The presence of IIFCs in local communities has contributed to job creation and economic growth, and now, increased economic opportunities for women.

#### **INFRASTRUCTURE**

Road Paving Begins in Fayzabad: On April 19, 500 provincial authorities and community representatives attended a ceremony celebrating the beginning of asphalt paving of the Fayzabad section of the Kishim-Fayzabad Road. The 103-km road is one of the most ambitious construction projects underway in Afghanistan. Winding through mountains and rough terrain, the seven-meter wide highway will facilitate transportation in the remote northern province of Badakhshan. Eventually, the road will serve as a vital link in the Afghan Government's plans to construct a two-lane road to the international border with China, increasing trade opportunities and decreasing travel time.



Paving begins in Fayzabad.

PHOTO: USAID/LBG/B&V Joint Venture



The Fourth Round of Government Accountability to the Nation was held from March 28-April 13, 2009.

PHOTO: USAID/Afghanistan

### **DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE**

Fourth Round of Government Accountability to the Nation: From March 28-April 13, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan held the Fourth Round of Government Accountability to the Nation. Cabinet members and heads of independent directorates briefed the nation on their work during the previous year, personally addressing approximately 130 representatives of the government, civil society organizations, the media, and academia. Intended to provide citizens with accurate information about the government's achievements and challenges, the annual review evaluated the work of 43 government departments.

The Fourth Round of Government Accountability to the Nation was a prime example of democracy in action, as ministers were both praised for their departments' achievements and asked to provide explanations for any shortcomings. Transparent reporting and open discussion of public sector activities demonstrate that Afghanistan is striving towards good governance and accountable service to its citizens.

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### **EDUCATION**

A New Way to Learn English: Thirteen faculty and staff of Shaikh Zayed University in the eastern province of Khost recently completed a four-month English course conducted in a new type of classroom – an Afghan Next Generation e-Learning (ANGeL) Center. The internet-based English course, taught by an ANGeL instructor, was supplemented with interactive exercises to enhance student participation. The outcome was overwhelmingly positive – all students passed the final exam and are now equipped with the language skills they need to better teach their students. Expressing his pleasure at the course results, Dr. Gul Nawaz, Vice Chancellor of



Shaikh Zayed University faculty, including Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs Hussain Hussaini, take their final exam in English. PHOTO: USAID/AeQA

Administrative Affairs stated, "Shaikh Zayed University is thankful for the ANGeL Center main staff who provide these facilities."

Founded in 2007, the Khost ANGeL Center is one of 11 state-of-the-art e-learning laboratories in universities throughout Afghanistan. The centers, established by USAID and the Afghan e-Quality Alliances program, make the internet and e-learning opportunities more accessible to university students, faculties, and staff. In particular, faculty and staff who participate in ANGeL Center courses enhance their capacity in IT skills, English, and other subject matter, thus facilitating curriculum improvements to better meet the needs of Afghan university students in the 21st century.